

Testimony before a joint committee of the Michigan Legislature
Regarding Senate Bills No. 388 and 389 and House Bills No. 4677 and 4678

Testimony by: Willard M Rose, Ph.D., President & CEO, Kalamazoo Nature Center,
Member Citizens Committee for Michigan State Parks

Date: Wednesday, April 1, 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen, My name is Bill Rose, and I am testifying before you today as the President and CEO of the Kalamazoo Nature Center. The Kalamazoo Nature Center is one of the oldest and largest nature centers in the nation and ranked as one of the best.

Today I am here to speak in favor of Senate Bills No 388 and 389 and House Bills No. 4677 and 4678. I do so because the provisions of this legislation which will benefit State and local parks will help forward an important effort that the Kalamazoo Nature Center has been involved with for several years. This effort, called "No Child Left Inside", has grown into a national movement and is based on decades of research on the benefits of children spending time in nature such as that found in our State and local parks. The research findings present a compelling and urgent case for the social, emotional, physical and educational benefits of spending time outdoors in a natural setting. A few examples compiled by the Children & Nature Network (see www.childrenandnature.org for more details) include:

- Children will be smarter, better able to get along with others, healthier and happier when they have regular opportunities for free play in the out-of-doors. (Burdette, H., M.D. and Whitaker, R., M.D., 2005, American Medical Association.)
- Contact with the natural world can significantly reduce symptoms of attention-deficit disorder in children as young as five years old. (Kuo, F. and Taylor, A., 2004, American Journal of Public Health.)
- Physical activity provides important health benefits to children and; children who spend more time outdoors are more active than children who spend less time outdoors. (Hinkley, T., Crawford, D., 2008, American Journal of Preventive Medicine.)
- Children concentrated better after walking in a park setting, helping to close the gap between children with ADHD and those without ADHD. (Faber, T. and Kuo, F., 2008, Journal of Attention Disorders OnlineFirst.)

State and local parks have an important role to play in ensuring Michigan children and youth have the opportunity to spend significant time in the outdoors. Offering Michigan residents easy access to State Parks through the vehicle registration process will encourage Michigan's residents to take advantage of the amazing natural resources and beauty that is Michigan. In addition, the funding will address the critical need for improvements and maintenance to keep State and local parks and recreation areas the type of places people will want to continue to visit many times throughout the year. In addition this legislation will free up staff to provide the kind of customer service and interpretation that will help visitors feel welcome and comfortable in the beautiful Michigan outdoors. All of this will result in Michigan's children being happier, healthier and smarter.

Thank you for your time and attention and for the opportunity to come before you today.